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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Lebanon Bombing
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Key stories in the media:

All media reported that State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher announced Tuesday, a day after the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri, that the U.S. recalled its ambassador to Syria, Margaret Scobey, for "urgent consultations." Leading media quoted White House Secretary Scott McClellan as saying Tuesday: "Yesterday's attack was a disturbing development, and we have made it clear to Syria that we expect Syria to act in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution calling for the withdrawal of all foreign troops and the disbanding of militias." Ha'aretz reported that political sources in Jerusalem expressed satisfaction Tuesday at the U.S. decision. The sources were quoted as saying: "This step underscores our argument that Syria's intentions for peace must be treated with caution." Israel Radio reported that its New York correspondent heard from U.S. diplomats that this was only the beginning of U.S. moves against Syria. Jerusalem Post web site reported that Minister Mofaz told soldiers on Tuesday that the bombing was launched by a pro-Syrian "terror organization which from what we know is apparently supported by the Syrians."

All media reported on PM Sharon's annual conference with the Foreign Press Association Tuesday. Sharon said that Israel is standing at the crossroads of peace after last week's summit meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh. Sharon was also quoted as saying that despite Israeli and American protests, Russia is going ahead with plans to sell SA-18 antiaircraft missiles to Syria.

All media reported that the Knesset started debating the evacuation-compensation bill Tuesday, and that it will vote on it today. The media expect around 70 Knesset members to support it, and around 40 to vote against it -- including 13 Likud lawmakers. Ha'aretz says articles of the bill stipulate that compensation to residents and businesses to be evacuated from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank will cost 4.3 billion shekels (close to USD 1 billion), as opposed to the government's original estimate of 3 billion shekels.

Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post quoted Chief of Staff Ayalon as saying before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Tuesday that the situation in the PA is "fragile," and that Israel has made clear to Abbas that it would not be satisfied with police deployment and PA talks to persuade the heads of terror groups, but that it expects Abbas to disarm Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Israel Radio quoted a senior Palestinian source as saying that Israel is delaying the implementation of agreements and understandings with the PA. Jerusalem Post reported that about 350 Palestinian gunmen will be incorporated into the PA security forces soon as part of a deal reached between PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and leaders of all the Palestinian factions. Jailed Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that the Intifada is not over, and that Israel is ridiculing and weakening Abbas.

Leading media reported that IDF troops killed two armed

Tanzim militants near Nablus. Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian sources as saying that settlers killed a 15-year-old Palestinian who had stoned Israeli vehicles in Bitunya near Ramallah. Israel Radio reported that this morning, Palestinians fired five mortar shells at Israeli targets in the Gaza Strip -- an IDF base and two settlements. There were no casualties.

Ha'aretz reported that Construction and Housing Minister Yitzhak Herzog (Labor) plans to expand the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Har Homa, near Bethlehem, eastward, to create continuity with Ma'aleh Adumim.

All media highlighted the fact that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz announced his decision Tuesday not to extend the term of IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon for a fourth year, as is customary. The move, which was coordinated with PM Sharon, is seen as a sign of the friction between Sharon and Ya'alon, particularly regarding what Sharon perceived as independent positions Ya'alon took on various issues during the last three years. Numerous political and military sources (according to Israel Radio, "almost across the board") as well as many media, criticized the decision as an "overthrow" and even a "scandal." Yediot sees Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Dan Halutz as the leading contender for Ya'alon's succession. The other candidate for the post is former deputy Chief of Staff Gaby Ashkenazi.

Yediot reported that on Tuesday, dozens of writers, poets, and publishers from Israel and the Arab world attended a meeting at the Sheikh Hussein Bridge along the Israel-Jordan border. The newspaper underscored the participation in the gathering of "national" Lebanese poet Samir al-Youssef, who collaborated with Israeli author Etgar Keret on "Gaza Blues," a collection of short stories. In contrast, Jerusalem Post reported that only Jewish and Arab Israeli writers met at the border crossing. As the 141-nation Kyoto Protocol is formally taking effect today, Ha'aretz headlines: "Entire World to Call Today to Save the World -- Except the U.S."

11. Lebanon Bombing:

Summary:

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The Washington administration is preparing a sweet revenge: either Syria will lose Lebanon, or Bashar will lose his throne."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Lebanon represents another early test of President George W. Bush's second term inaugural commitment to stand with people who are struggling for their freedom."

Former ambassador to the U.S. Prof. Itamar Rabinovich wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The recall of the U.S. Ambassador in Damascus for consultations in Washington [is] ... the first expression of a change in style at the State Department following the changeover from Colin Powell to Condoleezza Rice."

Block Quotes:

I. "A Warning to Assad"

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 16): "It isn't democracy that Bush is seeking in Damascus, but war on the dictator who resides in the People's Palace and begs Israel for peace each time the American boot bears down on him. It turned out on Tuesday that the late Hariri warned the Americans two weeks before his elimination that 'it will be I, or Walid Jumblatt,' pointing an [accusing] finger eastward toward Damascus. Assad is very fortunate to have chosen such a dangerous ally as Iran. He is lucky that the Americans are badly entangled in Iraq. He won't be lucky if Syria's fingerprints are found in Hariri's elimination. The Washington administration is preparing a sweet revenge: either Syria will lose Lebanon, or Bashar will lose his throne."

II. "The Hariri Hit"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (February 16): "Just when things appeared to be looking

up for the cause of democracy in this region, the 'old' Middle East reared its violent head in Beirut and assassinated Rafiq Hariri, Lebanon's former prime minister of 14 years. He resigned recently to press demands for the end of Syrian occupation of his country, thereby also enabling it to make its peace with Israel. Hariri was due to run on an anti-Syrian platform in the upcoming election this spring. That made him dangerous to Damascus. By openly disobeying Lebanon's Syrian masters, Hariri took the gravest of risks according to the notorious codes of the old Middle East, where no dissent is brooked.... Lebanon represents another early test of President George W. Bush's second term inaugural commitment to stand with people who are struggling for their freedom. The Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 was laudable but has so far accomplished little more than somewhat discomfiting President Bashar Assad and eliciting from him feeble gestures of goodwill in order to ease the pressure. The law contains a menu of sanctions, some of which have not been imposed. One wonders if Syria has really gotten the message from this gentle U.S. approach, not to mention Europe's kid gloves treatment..... [Hariri] symbolized Lebanon's potential for future progress. Perhaps it was that which the huge car bomb that ravaged the Lebanese capital's seafront was designed to destroy. It is fully within the power of the West, with America in the lead, to make sure that this bleak and vicious scheme backfires on those who have hatched it."

III. "Condoleezza's Line"

Former ambassador to the U.S. Prof. Itamar Rabinovich wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 16): "The recall of the U.S. Ambassador in Damascus for consultations in Washington has a four-fold significance: an immediate response to the murder of Rafiq Hariri; venting off accumulated anger over Syrian assistance to the Iraqi insurgents; a threat to further diplomatic sanctions and possible punitive military actions at a later stage; and the first expression of a change in style at the State Department following the changeover from Colin Powell to Condoleezza Rice. During the eight years of president Clinton's term, the United States' relations with Syria were shaped by an attempt to reach a peace treaty between Israel and Syria. The Clinton administration viewed such an arrangement as the proper basis for the Israeli-Arab peace process, as well as a way to push Iran from the center of the Middle East to its sidelines. The Bush administration has fundamentally reversed that attitude. Its more limited interest in Israeli-Arab relations has focused on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. It views Syria first and foremost as a terror-sponsoring state allied with Iran, and a partner in the 'axis of evil.'"

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Prof. Uzi Arad, who was a senior strategic advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Territorial exchange is relatively simple, if only because it does not require uprooting any population and moving it."

Ultra-Orthodox Yated Ne'eman editorialized: "The decision makers appear to be paying insufficient attention to fears of a domestic war, whose outcome cannot be foreseen."

Block Quotes:

1I. "The Demographic Key"

Prof. Uzi Arad, who was a senior strategic advisor to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 16): "The issue [of territorial exchange] is not more complex than the disengagement, for example. On the contrary, compared to various moves that Israel has considered to maintain the Jewish-democratic character of the state, territorial exchange is relatively simple, if only because it does not require uprooting any population and moving it. Fulfillment of the populated territorial exchange plan will allow Israel to hold onto unpopulated areas in Judea, Samaria and the Jordan Valley [the West Bank] as needed for its security as well as areas populated by Jews, while preserving its

Jewish democratic character. Therefore, it would be proper for Israel to put the territorial exchange plan onto the agenda, now, as an inseparable part of the future final agreement if it wants defensible borders for a Jewish and democratic state."

II. "Unilateral Formula"

Ultra-Orthodox Yated Ne'eman editorialized (February 16): "In no way will the process of evacuation [of settlers] be easy. The idea of 'evacuation by hugging' sounds like a winning slogan, but it isn't clear whether the settlers will agree to be partners in the Chief of Staff's unilateral formula. The decision makers appear to be paying insufficient attention to fears of a domestic war, whose outcome cannot be foreseen. It should be remembered that peace is meant to prevent bloodshed, and not to produce an new channel for it."

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